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(54) **LIGHT WEIGHT ROCKET PROPELLED
GRENADE NET PROTECTION SYSTEM AND
MANUFACTURING PROCESS**

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12, 2014.

(51) **Int. Cl.**

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F41H 5/06 (2006.01)
F41H 5/02 (2006.01)
B29C 65/08 (2006.01)
B29K 69/00 (2006.01)
B29L 28/00 (2006.01)

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(2013.01); **F41H 5/06** (2013.01); **B29K**
2069/00 (2013.01); **B29L 2028/00** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

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B29C 65/08; **B29L 2028/00**
See application file for complete search history.

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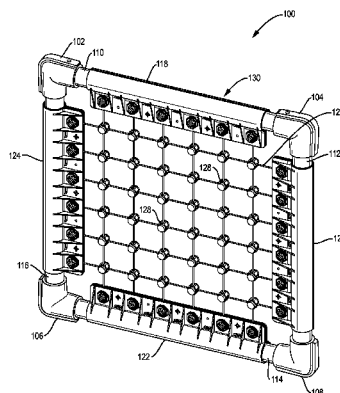
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(57)

ABSTRACT

An improved system for protecting vehicles or other objects from rocket propelled grenade (RPG) attacks. A net panel of the improved system weighs and costs substantially less than a conventional protective system panel, and requires minimal manual work to manufacture, install, replace or repair. When assembled, the hard points, as well as the panels, are symmetrical meaning that a panel does not have a left, right, inward or outward face and may be used on either side of a vehicle. The net may be manufactured as a continuous web or roll and does not require any edging for securing it to a frame. In addition, a damaged net may be replaced easily and rapidly using a simple hand tool.

16 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



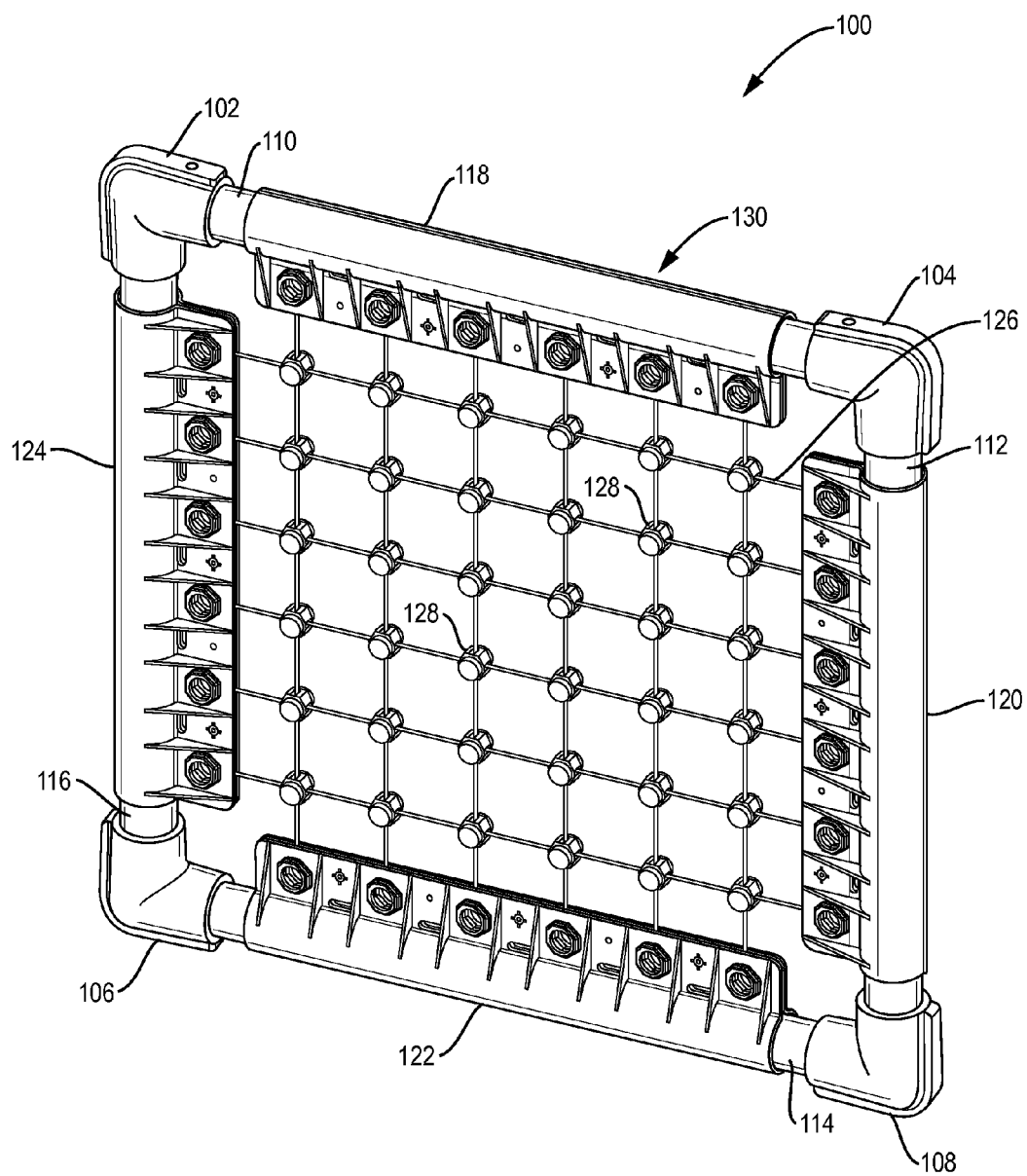


FIG. 1

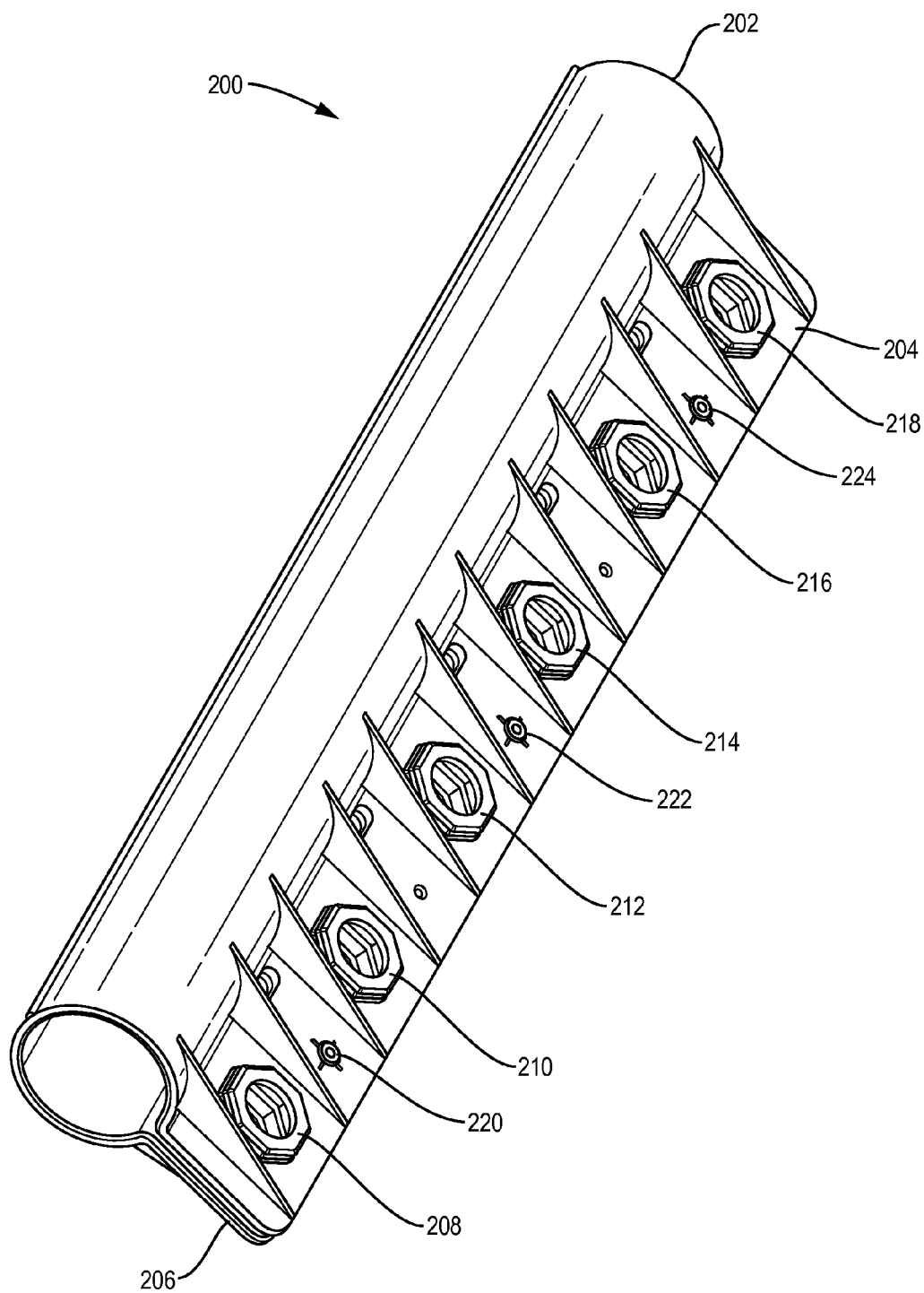


FIG. 2

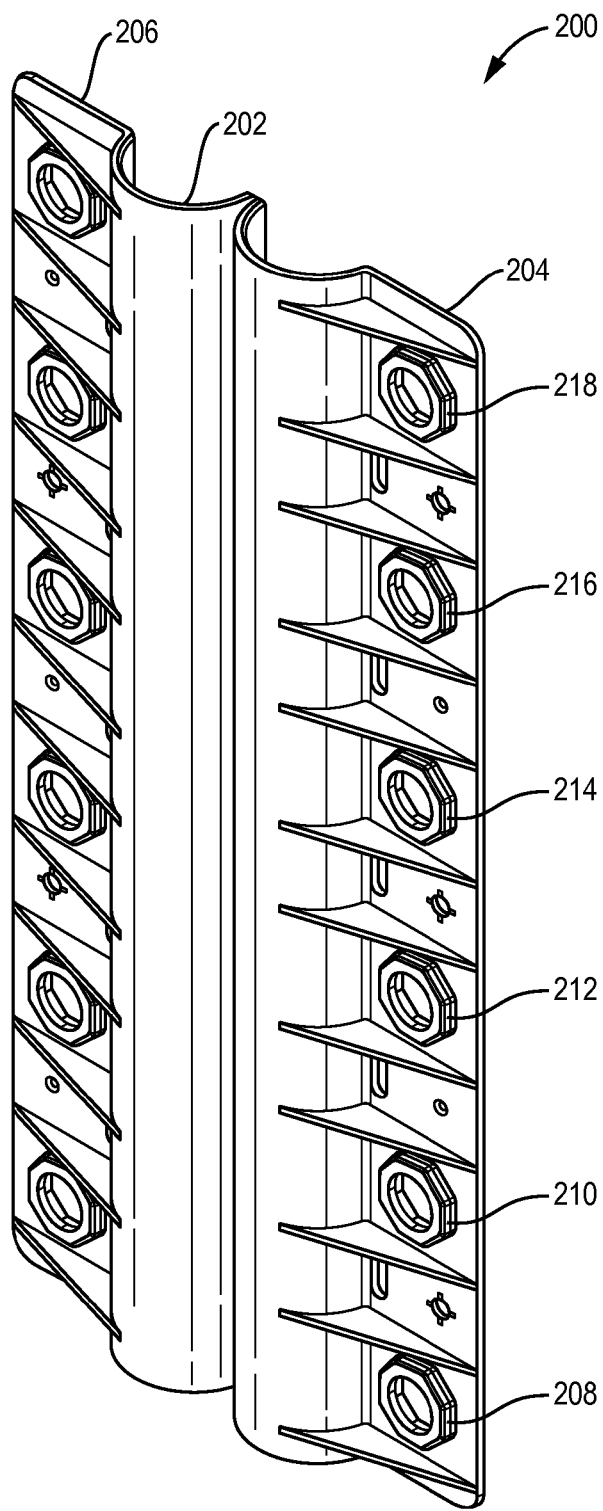


FIG. 3

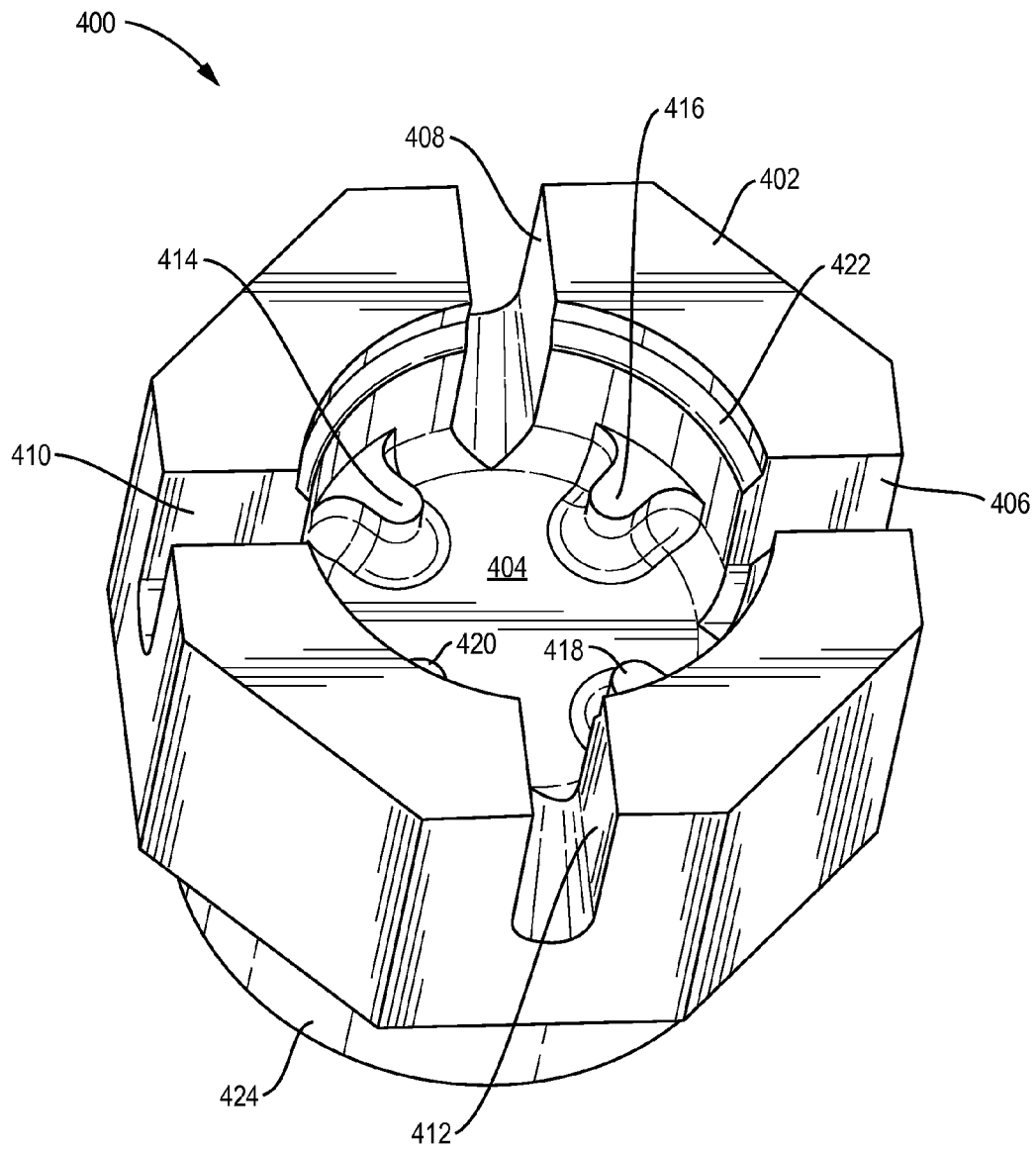
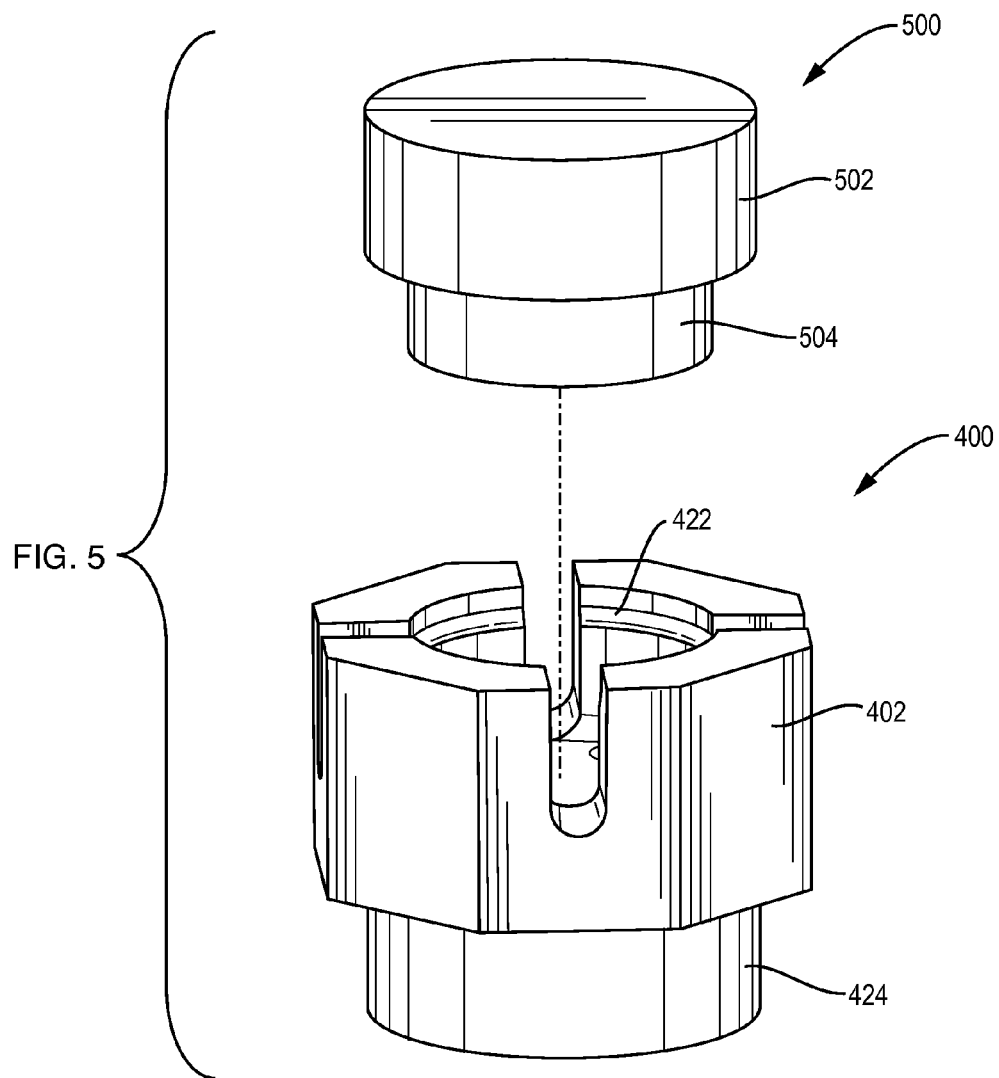


FIG. 4



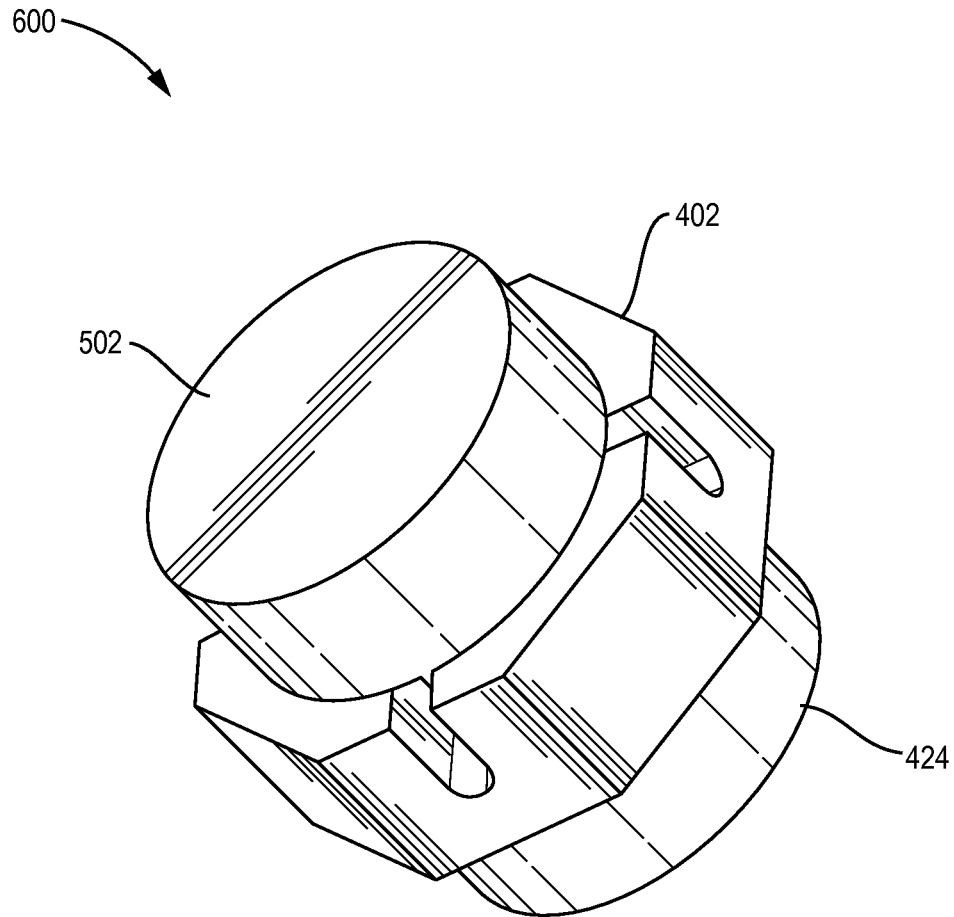


FIG. 6

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LIGHT WEIGHT ROCKET PROPELLED GRENADE NET PROTECTION SYSTEM AND MANUFACTURING PROCESS

The present application claims priority from a provisional application of common title, inventorship and ownership. That provisional application was filed on Nov. 12, 2014, application No. 62/078,660, and it is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to an improved system for protecting vehicles or other objects from a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) attack.

2. Background Information

Within the past few years, in response to military demand for improved protection of vehicles against rocket propelled grenade (RPG) attacks, at least one manufacturer developed a protective system. The system is based on metal-framed panels of nets which may be attached to a vehicle's exterior to effectively cover all or most of the chassis. Each panel is attached such that it is spaced away from the chassis by a certain distance. The net of each panel includes hard points which are secured to the intersections of the net's filaments. Essentially, if an RPG is fired at the vehicle and strikes the net, the accompanying deformation of the net causes one or more adjacent hard points to move laterally and contact the RPG's nose cone. This contact occurs with sufficient force to destroy the RPG's fuse or otherwise interfere with detonation.

While the conventional system discussed above is believed to be generally effective, it exhibits certain disadvantages. First, the hard points, which are formed from two metal pieces, are attached to the net by hand. This process is slow, costly, and incompatible with injection molding or other automated manufacturing techniques.

Second, due to the number of metallic hard points needed to fully protect a large vehicle, as well as the metal frames of the panels, the conventional system adds substantial weight to the vehicle. Such additional weight adversely affects vehicle performance while also increasing operating and maintenance costs for the vehicle.

Third, when fully assembled, the hard points of the conventional system are asymmetrical in shape. That is, one side of the hard points is intended to face outwardly from the chassis of the vehicle, and the other side is intended to face inwardly toward the chassis. Due to such asymmetry, a panel which is made for a left side of a vehicle typically cannot be used on the right side and vice versa. This asymmetry essentially doubles the number of panels needed in inventory for spares and replacements. It also likely frustrates personnel in the field as it prevents replacing a lost or damaged panel with an available panel that is the made for the opposite side of the vehicle.

Fourth, to enable the net to be attached to its metal frame, the conventional system includes a canvass edging which is hand sewn to the perimeter of the net. The canvass edging is lashed or otherwise attached to the frame. This process is slow and costly, and effectively prevents the replacement of a damaged net separate from the frame. If either a net or frame is damaged, the entire panel must be detached from the vehicle and replaced. This represents a time-consuming process which may be extremely difficult or dangerous to carry out except at a secure, well equipped maintenance facility.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In brief summary, the present invention provides an improved system for protecting vehicles or other objects from

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RPG attacks. The panels of the improved system weigh and cost substantially less than a conventional protective system, and require minimal manual work to manufacture, install, replace or repair. When assembled, the hard points, as well as the panels, may be symmetrical meaning that a panel does not have a left, right, inward or outward face and may be used on either side of the vehicle.

Some of the weight and cost savings provided by the present invention is achieved by forming the hard points from a non-metallic material such as polycarbonate. Polycarbonate is lightweight and characterized by a high impact resistance. In addition, polycarbonate is compatible with automated manufacturing techniques such as ultrasonic welding, which enables much more rapid and lower cost manufacturing of the panels. In turn, such automated manufacturing compatibility enables manufacture of a net, with hard points attached, in the form of a web or roll from which desired sizes may be cut. In the event that polycarbonate alone provides insufficient hard point weight for the requirements of a particular application, an insert made of metal or other material may be overmolded.

Additional weight reduction is achieved by using a molded clamp made of high impact polypropylene plastic that attaches the net to the frame already attached to the vehicle. The clamp utilizes a "living hinge" that allows it to open and accept a row or column of hard points that are set in pre-molded cavities and then snaps over the tubular frame locking both the hard points and the net into position. This technique eliminates the need of canvass edging, straps, hook and loop materials that are currently sewn onto the net.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention description below refers to the accompanying drawings, of which:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an assembled panel, including a net with hard points secured at the intersections of the net's filaments, for use with an improved RPG protective system constructed in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the net clamp, in a closed position, which is attached to each side of the panel shown in FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a perspective view of the clamp structure of FIG. 2 in an open position;

FIG. 4 is a perspective view of the internal web configuration that is molded into the hard point base to center the filament within the hard point during assembly and welding operations;

FIG. 5 is an elevation view of two mating pieces prior to being joined to form a hard point; and

FIG. 6 is a perspective view of an assembled, symmetrical hard point.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS

FIG. 1 shows a panel 100 which may be used to protect a vehicle or other object (not shown) from an RPG attack. While panel 100 is depicted as rectangular, the overall shape of panel 100 may be varied to match a corresponding portion of a vehicle's chassis or to meet the requirements of a particular application. Panel 100 includes a frame 130 formed primarily by four corners 102, 104, 106, 108, and four tubes 110, 112, 114 and 116 which are secured to the corners. Each of tubes 110, 112, 114, 116 is jacketed, respectively, by a hinged clamp 118, 120, 122, and 124. A net 126, which spans

the area within frame **100** is attached to clamps **118**, **120**, **122**, and **124**. A hard point **128** is fixed at each intersection of the filaments of net **126**.

As discussed in detail below, each of clamps **118**, **120**, **122**, and **124** includes apertures which are adapted to receive a row or column of hard points **128**. By opening each clamp **118**, **120**, **122**, and **124**, seating a row or column of hard points **128** in the corresponding apertures, then closing the clamp, net **126** is securely fastened to frame **100**. Further, in the event net **126** is damaged or otherwise in need of replacement, the net may be removed and replaced without replacing the clamp or the frame.

Clamps **118**, **120**, **122**, and **124** may be constructed from a variety of high impact thermoplastics such as polypropylene. In addition to reducing weight, plastics do not corrode and are durable in harsh environments. Net **126** may be constructed from Kevlar® or other appropriate materials. Hard points **128** may be constructed from polycarbonate material as described below.

FIG. **2** is an enlarged, perspective view of a clamp **200** like those shown in FIG. **1**. A living hinge **202** is dimensioned to tightly fit a tube (omitted for greater clarity) when clamp **200** is closed. Two flanges **204**, **206** are integrally formed with living hinge **202**. Flanges **204**, **206** each have a series of apertures **208**, **210**, **212**, **214**, **216**, **218** which are substantially aligned when clamp **200** is closed. Apertures **208**, **210**, **212**, **214**, **216**, **218** are shaped and dimensioned to securely hold a row or column of hard points **128** (FIG. **1**) which are attached to net **126**. Snaps **220**, **222** and **224** serve to lock clamp **200** in a closed position. Snaps **220**, **222** and **224** are friction engaged and may be disengaged by a simple hand tool.

FIG. **3** shows clamp **200** of FIG. **2** in an open position. By opening clamp **200**, assembly of panel **100** is facilitated. Initially, with clamp **200** open, an associated tube **110**, **112**, **114**, **116** (FIG. **1**) may be easily placed in living hinge **202**. In addition, open clamp **200** allows for a row or column of hard points **128** (not shown) to be seated, respectively, in apertures **208**, **210**, **212**, **214**, **216**, **218** in one of flanges **204**, **206**. Once the hard points are seated, clamp **200** may be closed and locked with snaps **220**, **222** and **224**. In this fashion, clamp **200** effectively secures net **126** to frame **100** without the need for a canvass edging.

FIG. **4** shows a hard point base **400**, one of two mating pieces which when joined together form a hard point **128**. An upper portion **402** of hard point base **400** is octagonal in shape with a central cavity **404**. Cavity **404** is intersected by four channels **406**, **408**, **410**, **412**, each of which is shaped and dimensioned to accommodate a filament of net **126** (omitted for clarity). The bottom of cavity **404** includes four integral bosses **414**, **416**, **418**, **420** which serve to limit lateral movement of the net filaments after the hard point has been secured to the net.

A chamfered sidewall **422** of cavity **404** provides a stop for a second piece (not shown) which is a mate to hard point base **400**. A portion **424** of hard point base **400** is substantially cylindrical.

FIG. **5** shows a hard point cap **500** which is a mate to hard point base **400**. A portion **502** of second hard point piece **500** is substantially the same size and shape as portion **424** of hard point base **400**. A portion **504** of hard point cap **500** is shaped and dimensioned to mate with cavity **404** and engage chamfered sidewall **422**. When hard point base **400** and hard point cap **500** are joined together, they form a symmetrical hard point **600** as shown in FIG. **6**. With such hard point symmetry, an assembled panel **100** (FIG. **1**) does not have a left, right, inward or outward face and may be used on either side of a vehicle.

Hard point base **400** and hard point cap **500** may be formed of a polycarbonate material whose advantages include light weight and compatibility with ultrasonic welding. Other such manufacturing practices include thermoforming hard points directly onto a pre-cut net shape or a continuous roll eliminating the need of ultrasonic welding. Such compatibility enables manufacture of a continuous web or roll of net, with hard points attached, which may then be cut to size for a desired panel. In addition, if the desired weight of an assembled hard point is greater than the weight of the polycarbonate material alone, it is possible to overmold an insert made of metal or other suitable material. Fillers such as fiberglass, carbon fiber and the like could be added to the base material to change the physical properties of the hard points. Other such families of thermoplastic materials that could be used to manufacture hard points would include High Density Thermoplastics.

What is claimed is:

1. A panel for a system for protecting a vehicle from a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) attack, the panel comprising: a net which includes a plurality of intersecting filaments, said net having an edge which is removably attached to a plurality of hinged clamps, each of said plurality of hinged clamps arranged to jacket a portion of a frame, each of said plurality of hinged clamps including a plurality of apertures; said panel being shaped and dimensioned to protect at least one portion of a vehicle when installed in a predetermined spaced relationship on said vehicle; and a plurality of hard points each of which is located at a different intersection of said intersecting filaments, each of said hard points assembled by ultrasonically welding two mating pieces of polycarbonate material which when joined form a symmetrical hard point secured to said net, at least one row or column of said hard points located along said edge being removably secured within said plurality of apertures of one of said plurality of hinged clamps, thereby securing said net to said frame.
2. The system as in claim 1 wherein one or more of said plurality of hinged clamps is locked and unlocked by a plurality of snaps.
3. The panel as in claim 1 wherein said frame includes a plurality of tubes, each of said plurality of tubes shaped and dimensioned to fit within a hinge of one of said plurality of hinged clamps.
4. The panel as in claim 1 wherein a first one of said two mating pieces of polycarbonate material is formed with a central cavity and four channels, said channels shaped and dimensioned to accommodate portions of first and second filaments of said plurality of filaments.
5. The panel as in claim 4 wherein said central cavity includes four integral bosses which limit lateral movement of said portions of first and second filaments.
6. The panel as in claim 4 wherein said central cavity includes a chamfered sidewall which provides a stop for a second one of said two mating pieces of polycarbonate material.
7. The panel as in claim 1 wherein said panel is symmetrical.
8. The panel as in claim 1 wherein said plurality of hinged clamps are formed from high impact polypropylene plastic.
9. A method for manufacturing a panel for a system for protecting a vehicle from a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) attack, the method comprising the steps of: forming a net by arranging a plurality of filaments such that said filaments form a plurality of intersections;

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at each of said intersections securing a symmetrical hard point to said net, each said symmetrical hard point formed by joining two mating pieces of polycarbonate material by ultrasonic welding;

forming a frame of a predetermined size;

attaching a plurality of hinged clamps to said frame, each of hinged clamps including apertures which are shaped and dimensioned to accept a row or column of said hard points; and

using said hinged clamps to secure said net to said frame.

10. The method as in claim **9** wherein said frame is formed by connecting a plurality of tubes, each of said plurality of tubes shaped and dimensioned to fit within a hinge of one of said plurality of hinged clamps.

11. The method as in claim **9** wherein each of said plurality of hinged clamps, once attached to said frame, is locked in a closed position by one or more snaps.

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12. The method as in claim **9** wherein a first one of said two mating pieces of polycarbonate material is formed with a central cavity and four channels, said channels shaped and dimensioned to accommodate portions of first and second filaments of said plurality of filaments.

13. The method as in claim **12** wherein said central cavity is formed with four integral bosses which limit lateral movement of said portions of first and second filaments.

14. The method as in claim **12** wherein said central cavity is formed with a chamfered sidewall which provides a stop for a second one of said two mating pieces of polycarbonate material.

15. The method as in claim **9** wherein said panel is formed symmetrically.

16. The method as in claim **9** wherein said plurality of hinged clamps are formed from high impact polypropylene plastic.

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